BATMAN
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A Gotham Tale
PART TWO • BY WAGNER & KENNEDY

A GOTHAM TALE

PART: 2 VENGING SPIRITS

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JEEZ! YOU SEE THAT!
RUN INTO ONE OF THEM, YOU'D BE FRIED LIKE A WEENIE!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
SOME PEOPLE TRAPPED IN THE VAULT. SEE THAT LIEUTENANT.
NEWS
WHAT A NIGHT!
YEAH, BE A LOT BETTER IF WE WAS THE ONES ALL NICE AN' SNUG IN THAT VAULT!
DON'T DO IT, MISS CREIGHTON-!

ONE OF THESE DARTS WOULD GIVE YOU A PLEASANT FORTY WINKS. THREE WOULD MOST CERTAINLY BE LETHAL.
YOU'VE NO RIGHT-!
YOU SAID IT YOURSELF- THERE ISN'T ENOUGH AIR FOR THREE! ONE OF US HAS TO DIE!
NOT YOU. CALL IT AN OLD-FASHIONED ATTITUDE, MISS CREIGHTON, BUT YOU'RE NOT PART OF THIS DEAL.
WE'RE AGREED ON THAT, AREN'T WE, DOCTOR?
YES... OF COURSE.
THEN IT'S YOU OR ME.
--DOCTOR MORRIS BAGLETON, SENIOR BIOCHEMIST AT THE GOTHAM INSTITUTE, CHRISTINA CREIGHTON, WHO'S SUPERVISING THE EXHIBITION HERE... AND BATMAN.
CREIGHTON- ISN'T THAT THE GARGOYLE'S DAUGHTER?
HOW DO THOSE THREE END UP LOCKED IN A VAULT? WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON HERE?
IS THAT BLOOD THEY'RE MOPPIN' UP?
NAH, KETCHUP.
GIMME A BREAK, LIEUTENANT...!
YOU'LL GET A FULL STATEMENT IN DUE COURSE. RIGHT NOW, ALL I'M CONCERNED ABOUT IS THOSE PEOPLE IN THERE.

YOU HEAR THAT? THEY'RE CUTTING!
DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP. THEY WON'T BE THROUGH IN TIME -NOT FOR ALL OF US.
THE AIR'S ALREADY GROWING STALER- YOU CAN TASTE IT!
LEAVE IT MUCH LONGER AND WE WON'T HAVE A CHOICE. THERE'LL ONLY BE ENOUGH AIR FOR ONE.
WE'VE HEARD MISS CREIGHTON. YOUR TURN, DOCTOR... WHY SHOULD YOU BE THE ONE TO LIVE?
DEAR ME... I APPEAR TO HAVE MADE A VERY FOOLISH BARGAIN...!
LET US EXAMINE THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE...

HERE AM I. AN OLD MAN... OLDER THAN MY YEARS, PERHAPS, BUT STILL, I'VE HAD MY FAIR CRACK AT LIFE. WHAT HAVE I ACHIEVED? NOTHING OF GREAT NOTE.
IN THE MATTER OF YOUR FATHER, CHRISTINA - IN CONCEALING THE TRUTH ABOUT HIM - AS FAR AS YOU ARE AWARE, I AM AS GUILTY AS YOU.
THEN THERE IS BATMAN.
HERO OF GOTHAM. DARK KNIGHT OF JUSTICE. HOW MANY LIVES HAS HE SAVED? HOW MANY EVILDOERS HAS HE PLACED BEHIND BARS?
AND HE'S YOUNG, STRONG. SO MANY GOOD YEARS AHEAD - FIGHTING CRIME, DEFENDING THE WEAK AND THE INNOCENT...
TELL ME HONESTLY, MY DEAR, WHO CAN YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE BUT HIM?
I CAN'T DECIDE-!
YOU MUST, CHRISTINA. YOU HAVE THE DECIDING VOTE. A TERRIBLE BURDEN ON YOUR YOUNG SHOULDERS, I KNOW...
NEVER MIND. LET ME RELIEVE YOU OF IT. I HAD NO INTENTION OF KEEPING THIS FOOLISH BARGAIN IN ANY CASE.
OH, IF BATMAN HAD BEEN THE ONE CHOSEN FOR CHRISTINA, IT WOULD HAVE SUITED ME WELL ENOUGH — FOR, CHRISTINA, I COULD NOT HAVE LET YOU DIE EITHER... UNLESS IT WAS BY MY OWN HAND.
WH-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I DON'T LIKE THE TURN OF THIS CONVERSATION, EAGLETON.
AIR'S RUNNING OUT - GET ON WITH IT.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT AIR. BEFORE LONG, I'M AFRAID, NEITHER OF YOU WILL NEED TO BREATHE.

DEAR, DEAR CHRISTINA... YOU'VE CONVINCED YOURSELF THE REASON DAVID HID YOU AWAY IN ENGLAND WAS TO PROTECT YOU FROM HIMSELF. BUT YOU'RE WRONG. QUITE, QUITE WRONG.
WH-WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? I HEARD MY FATHER CONFESS!
YOU SEE, I AM THE GARGOYLE.
OH, YES. IT'S TRUE - HE WAS THE GARGOYLE THAT FIRST NIGHT. HE DID PURSUE YOU WITH MURDEROUS INTENT. BUT NEVER AGAIN...
I WOULD HAVE KILLED HER, MORRIS! JUST BECAUSE WE USED HER BLOOD IN THE FORMULA... I WOULD HAVE KILLED HER.
YOU HAVE THE REST OF THE FORMULA - GET RID OF IT!
AFTER ALL THE WORK WE'VE DONE? YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!
IT'S NOT WHAT WE THOUGHT WE WERE CREATING! IT'S EVIL, MORRIS! DESTROY IT, D'YOU HEAR?
"BUT I COULDN'T JUST THROW AWAY THE KNOWLEDGE WE'D GAINED - THE SECRET WE'D UNCOVERED. NOT WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO EXPERIENCE IT..."
"BESIDES, IT WAS MINE AS MUCH AS DAVID'S. HE'D DISCOVERED THE ALCHEMIST'S MANUSCRIPT, BUT HE COULD NEVER HAVE HANDLED THE CHEMISTRY. I HAD A RIGHT TO KNOW!"

"THE STONE MAN", JORIX CALLED IT. IN OUR IGNORANCE WE THOUGHT IT WAS SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH THE ANCIENT ALCHEMISTS' SEARCH FOR THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE - THE STONE THAT CURED ALL ILLS AND GAVE THE BEARER ETERNAL YOUTH."
"WHAT WE CREATED WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT..."
"MUCH, MUCH DIFFERENT."
"BUT IN ITS OWN WAY, NO LESS MARVELOUS."

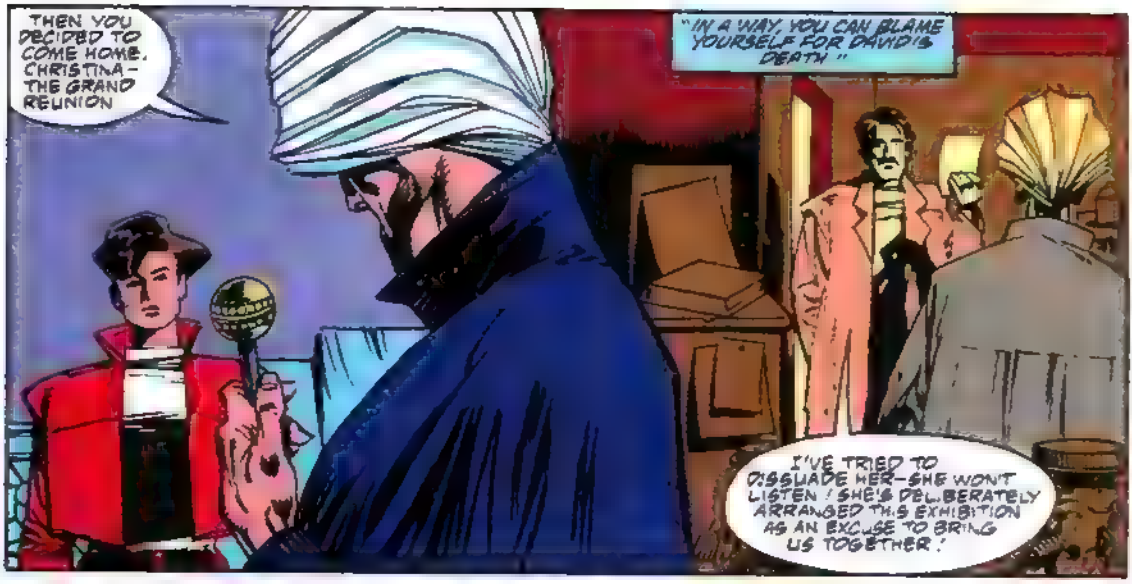
THE FEELING OF IT... I CANNOT DESCRIBE IT ADEQUATELY!
THE POWER, RAW POWER SURGING THROUGH EVERY SINEW! THE HUNGER- RAVENOUS, BESTIAL, UNREASONING!
EVERY SENSE, EVERY SENSATION MAGNIFIED-AS IF EVERYTHING BEFORE HAD BEEN NOTHING BUT A... A DULL PARODY OF EXISTENCE. I WAS ALIVE, TRULY ALIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME!
I CAME FOR YOU THAT NIGHT, CHRISTINA.
IT WAS YOUR BLOOD, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, THAT I CRAVED-
"IT WAS YOUR BLOOD WE USED TO COMPLETE THE FORMULA- TO CREATE THE STONE MAN..."
"ONLY YOUR BLOOD WOULD SATE HIM!"
I SUSPECTED YOU HADN'T DESTROYED THE FORMULA, MORRIS!
WHERE IS SHEEE?
WITH FRIENDS. WHERE YOU CAN'T REACH HER.
I MUST HAVE HER! YOU, MUST BRING HER TO ME!
NEVER! KEEP BACK, MORRIS, OR SO HELP ME I'LL SHOOT!
YOU CANNOT KEEP HER FROM ME!

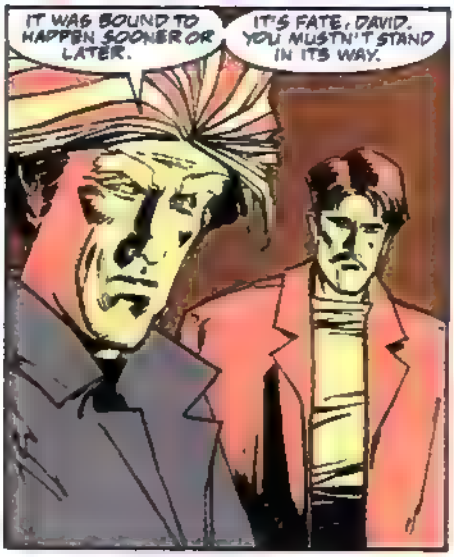
"I WENT OUT INTO THE CITY. I FOUND TWO VICTIMS."
PETRINI'S
"THOUGH THEIR BLOOD DID NOT TOTALLY ASSUAGE MY HUNGER, THE SENSATION OF ECSTASY AS I RIPPED THEM TO SHREDS WAS ALMOST OVERPOWERING."
WE MET THAT NIGHT.
I REMEMBER.
ONLY TOO WELL.
"MY ALTERED STATE DID NOT TOTALLY BLOT OUT REASON. I RECOGNIZED YOU AS A RIVAL, BATMAN."

I DON'T KNOW WHAT EXACTLY YOU ARE. BUT I'M PUTTING YOU OUT OF COMMISSION, PAL!
NEVER!
BELIEVE IT!
"WE STRUGGLED - BUT I WAS STRONGER, BATMAN!"

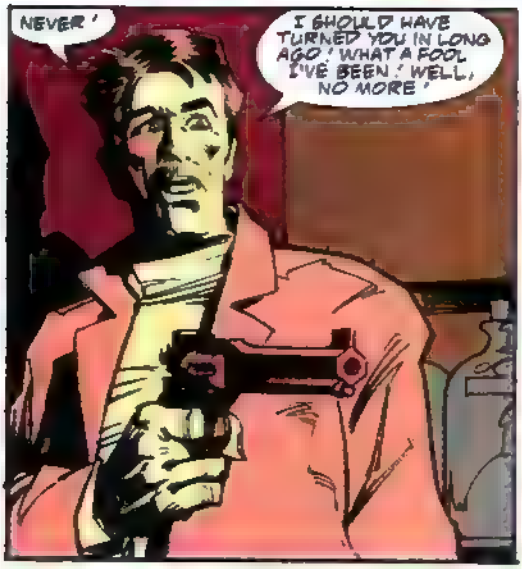
"I, NOT YOU!"
"I WAS STRONGER THAN BATMAN!"

THESE ARE DETAILS ONLY THE GARGOYLE COULD KNOW...
AH, YOU'RE BEGINNING TO BELIEVE ME NOW.
THE NEXT DAY DAVID BEGGED ME TO DESTROY THE FORMULA BUT THE GARGOYLE - AS THE PRESS CAME TO CALL IT - ALREADY HAD TOO STRONG A GRIP ON ME.
I FELT SOME... REGRET FOR THE VICTIMS, OF COURSE - BUT IT WAS NOTHING TO THE URGE, THE CRAVING, TO LET HIM TAKE POSSESSION OF ME AGAIN, TO FEEL THOSE DARK DESIRES PULSING IN ME...
DAVID THREATENED TO GO TO THE AUTHORITIES AND I LAUGHED AT HIM. MILD-MANNERED ACADEMIC TURNS INTO A RAVING MONSTER? WHO WOULD BELIEVE HIM?
A FEW DAYS LATER HE SENT YOU AWAY, OUT OF MY REACH.
AND ALL THROUGH THE YEARS HE KEPT QUIET? CUT ME OUT OF HIS LIFE AND LET YOU GO ON KILLING? I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND! WHY DIDN'T HE JUST TELL SOMEONE?
BLAME THE GARGOYLE. IT GOT ITS CLAWS INTO HIM TOO. HATE IT THOUGH HE MIGHT, HE COULDN'T BRING HIMSELF TO COMMIT THAT FINAL ACT— TO DESTROY WHAT HE HAD CREATED.
BESIDES, THERE WEREN'T SO VERY MANY KILLINGS
SIXTEEN VICTIMS ISN'T MANY?
YOU MAY SCOFF, BUT THERE COULD HAVE BEEN MORE, MANY MORE. BUT AFTER OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER, I KNEW I MUST BE MORE CAREFUL. I TRIED TO RATION MYSELF.
BESIDES, FAR FROM ETERNAL YOUTH, I COULD SEE THAT USE OF THE FORMULA WAS AGING ME...
I SUPPOSE EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE...
THE INFREQUENCY PUZZLED ME. THAT'S WHAT MADE YOU SO HARD TO FIND.


THEN YOU DECIDED TO COME HOME, CHRISTINA - THE GRAND REUNION
"IN A WAY, YOU CAN BLAME YOURSELF FOR DAVID'S DEATH"
I'VE TRIED TO DISSUADE HER - SHE WON'T LISTEN! SHE'S DELIBERATELY ARRANGED THIS EXHIBITION AS AN EXCUSE TO BRING US TOGETHER!


IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN SOONER OR LATER.
IT'S FATE, DAVID. YOU MUSTN'T STAND IN ITS WAY.

COME, SHE'S HAD A GOOD LIFE. NOW SHE'S COMING HOME - TO ME...
WHAT?
YOU KNOW IT'S ONLY RIGHT. SHE BELONGS TO ME - TO THE GARGOYLE - YOU KNOW THAT.
PERHAPS WHEN I HAVE HER THE BLOODLUST WILL DIE


NEVER!
I SHOULD HAVE TURNED YOU IN LONG AGO! WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN! WELL, NO MORE!

YOU WON'T HAVE HER, MORRIS! THE REST OF THE FORMULA - GIVE IT TO ME!
NOW COME, DA, D-
I'LL KILL YOU IF I HAVE TO!

"I COULD SEE THAT THIS TIME HE MEANT IT."
YOU GIVE ME NO CHOICE.
YOU WANT THE FORMULA-
YOU SHALL HAVE IT!
WH-WHAT'VE YOU DONE-?

"SUCH A SMALL DOSE WAS NOT ENOUGH TO EFFECT THE COMPLETE TRANSFORMATION- DAVID AND NOT DEVELOPED THE SAME AFFINITY AS I."
"BUT THAT WORKED TO MY ADVANTAGE. THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT THAT DAVID CREIGHTON WAS THE GARGOYLE."
"HE ATTACKED ME. I FIRED IN SELF DEFENSE. WHO WOULD DOUBT ME?"
YOU MURDERED HIM!
HE GAVE ME NO OPTION. IT WAS HIM-OR THE GARGOYLE.
JUST A MINUTE DOSE...
BUT IN MY CASE QUITE AMPLE...

YOU SEE HIM-TAKING HIS GRIP, CRAWLING UP MY ARM, EATING HIS WAY INTO MY SOUL!
AND THAT IS WHY BOTH OF YOU MUST DIE... FOR THE GARGOYLE MUST LIVE ON, HE INSISTS UPON IT!
A PITY, MY DEAR. I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED YOUR DEATH TO OCCUR UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES MORE OF MY CHOOSING.
TO HAVE SAVORED THE PROSPECT, PLANNED IT TO A NICETY...
PERHAPS A PLEASANT VISIT TO MY CABIN IN THE MOUNTAINS. THEN I COULD HAVE PASSED OFF THE SAVAGE RENDING OF YOUR BODY AS THE WORK OF AN ANIMAL.
YOU'RE SICK!
YESSS! BUT GLORIOUSLY SO!

AND HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN OUR DEATHS-- ASSUMING YOU CAN ADD US TO YOUR VICTIMS?
THE EFFECTS WILL HAVE WORN OFF BY THE TIME THE DOOR IS OPEN. I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING. I'M VERY RESOURCEFUL.
QUITE A STORY, DOCTOR NOW IT'S MY TURN-
TOO LATE. THERE'S NO POINT IN TALES NOW!
BUT YOU'LL FIND THIS ONE VERY INTERESTING-!
BEFORE I ENTERED THIS VAULT I KNEW DAVID CREIGHTON WASN'T THE GARGOYLE.
KLUNGGG
YOU KNEW-?

TONGGG TONGGG TONGGG
LISTEN'
THAT SHOOK YOU, DIDN'T IT?
TONGGG
THAT'S IT'
HOW COULD YOU KNOW-?
SOME MONTHS BACK I CAME ACROSS A PAPER BY DAVID CREIGHTON IN AN OLD SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL - "THEORIES ON THE NATURE OF THE STONE MAN".
THE CREATURE HE DESCRIBED BORN AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO THE GARGOYLE.
"I PLOTTED ALL REPORTED SIGHTINGS OF THE GARGOYLE - SIGHTINGS, NOT ATTACKS. THERE WAS A DEFINITE CONCENTRATION IN THE AREA OF THE GOTHAM INSTITUTE, WHERE CREIGHTON LIVED AND WORKED."
"SO I DUG A LITTLE DEEPER-"
"I FOUND OUT CREIGHTON HAD SENT HIS OWN DAUGHTER AWAY A FEW DAYS AFTER THE FIRST GARGOYLE KILLING. THAT MADE HIM A PRIME SUSPECT."

CREIGHTON! NOT ME!
BATMAN-!
DON'T WORRY, I CAN HANDLE HIM!
CREEP GOT LUCKY THE LAST TIME... THAT'S WHY HE'S BEEN TRYING SO HARD TO STAY OUT OF MY WAY.
- DIDN'T LIKE THE IDEA OF A RETURN MATCH!

HURRY IT UP!
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT. CREIGHTON WAS THE SUSPECT, NOT YOU. SO I KEPT AN EYE ON HIM -
WHAT'S UP, DOC? TRANQUILIZER GETTING TO YOU?
YOU REMEMBER THE LAST TIME? FORTY-THIRD STREET? YOUNG COUPLE SPREAD ALL OVER THEIR APARTMENT?
YOU MUST REMEMBER, DOCTOR?
I WAS WATCHING DAVID CREIGHTON THAT NIGHT. HE DIDN'T LEAVE HIS APARTMENT
HE WASN'T THE GARGOYLE THAT NIGHT, DOCTOR!

NEXT THING I KNOW THE GARGOYLE IS DEAD- AND IT IS CREIGHTON- SOMETHING DIDN'T ADD UP
AT THE INQUEST IT CAME OUT THAT YOU'D WORKED ON THIS FORMULA WITH CREIGHTON. THAT MADE YOU PRIME SUSPECT. AND THERE WERE FLAWS IN YOUR TESTIMONY.
WHY WAS NONE OF THE FORMULA EVER FOUND IN CREIGHTON'S APARTMENT? AND WHY BRING A GUN TO ATTACK YOU- WHAT USE DID THE GARGOYLE EVER HAVE FOR A GUN?
OF COURSE, NOBODY QUESTIONED TOO DEEPLY, THEY WERE ONLY TOO WILLING TO BELIEVE THEY'D CAUGHT THE GARGOYLE AT LAST. THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I KNEW...
"THE MISSING PART OF THE EQUATION WAS YOU."
TRANQUILIZER REALLY HITTING YOU NOW, DOC? GOOD! DON'T WANT TOO MUCH OF THAT "RAW POWER" ON SHOW WHEN THEY COME TO TAKE YOU AWAY!
I... I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
WE-WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE IN HERE...
NO. WE'RE NOT NOT EVEN YOU, UNFORTUNATELY.
BATMAN CAME TO SEE ME.
I WAS NEVER CALLED AS A WITNESS- I SUPPOSE THEY THOUGHT I'D HAVE NOTHING RELEVANT TO ADD, BEING SO FAR REMOVED FROM MY FATHER.
I TOLD HIM ABOUT YOUR LIE- ABOUT NOT KNOWING MY FATHER WAS THE GARGOYLE.
IT CONFIRMED MY SUSPICIONS, BUT THERE WAS NO HARD EVIDENCE AGAINST YOU. IF YOU WERE THE REAL GARGOYLE, HOW COULD WE PROVE IT?
WAIT FOR THE NEXT ATTACK? AND WHAT IF I MISSED YOU? SOME OTHER INNOCENT SLAUGHTERED- MAYBE MISS CREIGHTON?
NO... YOU HAD TO BE STOPPED. NOW- FLUSHED OUT INTO THE OPEN.

SHE'S ALL YOURS, LIEUTENANT.
THE GARGOYLE - IN THE FLESH!
NICE WORK, BATMAN!
YOU'VE BEEN SET UP, PAL.
THE - THE TIME LOCK - !?
NEVER ENGAGED.
BUT THE ROBBERY! THE SHOOTING?! I SAW -
BLOODPACKS!
ALL A SHAM. AN ELABORATE ONE, I'LL ADMIT. BUT IT HAD TO BE CONVINCING. YOU HAD TO BELIEVE IT.
THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY YOU'D EVER ADMIT YOUR GUILT. YOU HAD TO BELIEVE CONCEALMENT NO LONGER MATTERED...
YOU HAD TO BELIEVE YOU WERE GOING TO DIE.
A CONFESSION. THAT'S ALL WE NEEDED...
DIDN'T FIGURE ON YOU GOING ONE BETTER!
END

BAT-SIGNALS

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Well, we're still a few issues behind on letters, so we'll be covering two issues at once here, namely BATMAN #470 and #471.

And we're off...

Dear Kelley and Denny,

"Uh-oh, crossover time," I thought. "Let's take Batman out of his element and shoehorn him into someone else's story." Boy, was I wrong. Forgive me, guys. All around, this was a great issue. Ed Indelicato's inclusion was a complete surprise. I never really expected to see a supporting cast member from another title turn up in a major crossover. Alan captured his desperation and frustration perfectly.

And Robin! Let's talk about Robin. He is mature, efficient and extremely competent. Thank you, Alan, for emphasizing these traits, especially when the harpy grabbed him. You spared us a Robin-as-hostage scenario that most writers would have taken. Robin's suggestion at Arkham led Batman straight to Maxie Zeus, and Robin's intervention at the end saved Batman and secured the goblet. Bravo!

Norm Breyfogle is a master of capturing Batman at his most menacing. Page 3 was especially striking, with Batman's face in shadow; unlike the movie, I can believe this man could hold someone in mid-air, thanks to the physique Norm gives him. Maxie Zeus' madness was delightfully visible in Norm's depiction.

One request: we're reminded of Harold's presence throughout the marvelous devices that show up, but how about giving Harold some interaction with Bruce and Tim? It must be hard to write for a mute, but I feel it is worth it to show Harold is a person, not just a gadget factory.

Thanks for listening.

Paul Newton Hicks
Chatswood N.S.W Australia

Thanks for writing.

* * * * *

Dear Batmaniacs,

I knew it! I knew it! Page 22 of BATMAN #470 proved what I had suspected all along—that Grant, Breyfogle and O'Neil had done time at Arkham! Alan for even thinking of taking time off (do it again and I call out my Batposse), Norm for holding back his soon-to-be-published inks over his own pencils, and Denny for...well, just for being Denny!

Reynaldo Rubiera
New York, NY

And Denny does it oh, so well, too.

Done time there? Done time there? Are you kidding? Denny built the place—which explains a lot about his office...

Dear Bat-maniacs,

The scribbling on the wall of the solitary confinement chamber at Arkham Asylum (see last page of BATMAN #470) has confirmed my suspicions: The entire crew that produces this title is insane.

On the other hand, all of your faithful readers are quite normal.

Forever sane,
Jan C. Childress
Brooklyn, NY

Couldn't agree with you more, Jan.

* * * * *

Dear Bat-gang,

Just finished reading BATMAN#470, "Of Gods and Men," and I must say—IT WAS HYPE STUFF PLUS! The art was excellent (but then,what else can we expect from Norm Breyfogle?). Norm has a way with Bats—he makes him look like the night creature I've always envisioned him as. The inks were great, although I like Steve Mitchell's inks better (no offense, Rick).

The colors were rather good, but Ms. Roy colored Robin's gloves wrong in practically every frame (she did do that, didn't she? Or have I missed something? You guys didn't match the gloves with the boots behind my back, did you?).

Hey, hey—Bat-gear was in effect, boy! I wrote to your Bat-brothers in DETECTIVE COMICS telling 'em to give Batman more gear a while ago, so you can guess how I felt when I read this. I've always looked at Bats as being the type to prefer brains over brawn. He should have all sorts of infiltration equipment—glass cutters, lockpicks, counter-electronics devices —the works. I'd love it if you guys threw in espionage stories a bit more often, like the story in BATMAN #393 and #394. Doug and Paul proved that Bats blends in perfectly with the espionage world.

Okay, now I'd like to make a few suggestions.

1) How about giving Robin a cycle? I know he's a little young for one, but like Indelicato said, they're illegals. Robin needs something to get him places when he goes solo. Give it some thought.

2) Like I said before, I've always considered the Batman a creature of the night—someone who sticks to shadows. So why is the Batcave so well illuminated? In my opinion it should be as dark and murky and solemn as possible. It would go great with Bats' character. Of course, some places would have to be moderately illuminated, like the computer center and the labs and the statues and stuff and junk. But only moderately.

3) Batman and Robin's utility belts are rather sloppy looking, what with all that Bat-gear hanging off. Like I've suggested before, bring back the old, bulky utility belt.

4) That "R"-shaped blade of Robin's is neat. How about making it his calling card? I'm really expecting a lot of solos from Robin. I really like the dude. He should stay around for at least 200 issues!

5) Have this Robin get into fighting drug distribution in the high schools in Gotham. Kids would find it easier to open up to Robin than to Batman.

6) Robin's (hmm, I *have been* talking about him a lot, haven't I?) quarterstaff should be a major offensive weapon (if it isn't already). Have him master bo-jitsu (the Japanese martial art of staff fighting) and karate (he's already got those cool tabi boots. Might as well go the whole way).

That's all for now, Bat-guys. I'm outta here. But before I go, what advice do you have for an aspiring writer/artist like myself?

Coolly yours,
Mr. Sphynx

Is it Adrienne's fault that Robin decided to change his gloves for one night?

As for advice, the obvious is the best: read absolutely everything you can (not just comics) and practice like crazy. Virtually every single person I've met in this industry is incredibly well read and has a wide variety of interests. Trying to find a topic that Alan or Denny doesn't know something about is just about impossible. And it's obvious what an enormous amount of time Norm has spent honing his craft.

Remember: study real life. Don't just look at comic books. Check out the masters of art and literature, then practice. Learn how to write and draw first, then apply what you've learned to comics. Who knows? Maybe someday you'll be working for DC. Good luck.

* * * * *

Dear editor,

I read BATMAN #471 with great interest. It was fascinating to see writer Alan Grant handle the character Killer Croc with dignity and show the readers a different side of a usually crazed killer.

I like the subtle reference to the old Jimmy Dean song "Big Bad John." It was nice to see the comparison of Killer Croc and Big Bad John, and the way that they sacrificed themselves to save everybody else. Croc did it in the sewer and Big Bad John did it in a mine shaft. Nice parallel.

I'm glad to see Alan Grant getting a real fix on the Batman character. His work is reaching that same high intensity level of such action writers as Chuck Dixon, Mike Baron, and Archie Goodwin. Please tell him that he is heading in the right direction.

Thank you for your time. I am looking forward to some big changes in the Batman line of books. If the new Robin miniseries is any indication, then we are all in for a good time.

Reese Owens
Cattletsburg, KY

Well, I've already read the scripts, so take it from one who knows—we're all in for a good time.

* * * * *

Dear Bat-guys,

Every now and then a comics story comes by that makes you feel something other than suspense. The emotion I'm getting at is, of course, compassion. By the time Batman had shown up on the scene, Croc had become the good guy and Bats the evil villain. By the end I was in a state of awe by the way a person (or persons) can fit such a great story between page 1 and the lettercol. As I read this story I realize that Croc is not really a comics character, but a symbol of everyone's struggle with their inner demons. The fact that Croc's good side won gives me hope, but at the same time sadness because it cost Croc his life. I also have many more questions, such as—is he really dead? I doubt it. So few characters ever stay dead for an extended period of time. Other questions are—is Aunt Marcy his real aunt? I believe so, because as I've said before, this story is about inner turmoil, and what better turmoil than making up for past sins? Okay, now I've had my say, and I thank you for providing me with a soapbox to stand on.

David "the Demon" Garcia
Redlands, CA

Thank you for taking the time to stand on it for us, David.

* * * * *

Dear Danny,

OK, Killer Croc. This episode almost made me feel different about him. He had his own family there. It makes you think. If he was caring like that, what makes him a criminal? Was it the fact that due to his skin disease people treated him differently and he therefore took revenge on them? Is that it? If so, doesn't Batman see that?

I would like to see more of Ace in future issues. Perhaps he'll be of some significance in "The Idiot Root.n What I really wouldn't mind seeing is a Robin/Ace team-up.

Alan did a great job as usual. Norm did a twice-as-great-as-usual job, and I can't wait to see his drawings translated from Peter Milligan's script.

J.P. Richardson
Midland, TX

Denny and Kelley,

Over the past few months we've seen a lot of Killer Croc in all sorts of titles, most of which had a story involving Arkham Asylum. So, when ol' Killer finally decided to discharge himself from the asylum, it was inevitable that he'd end up in BATMAN, and very into current character. You see, in each of Killer's previous appearances, I've noticed his mellowing attitude. Here it shows how much the Killer Croc has mellowed, and our story, "Requiem for a Killer," spotlighted a most sympathetic side to him.

Someday Killer Croc will return. I don't believe for a minute that he is dead. The thing is, will he be back with his old or new attitude?

Sir Jon Johnson
Portland, CT

Probably.

* * * * *

Dear Bat-people,

Can you guys write, or can you guys write? I love the fact that more than one family can lodge together as if they were only one family. And the sewers! Endless tunnels, underground highways...I love it!

The best part was when Batman and Killer Croc had to work together to save about a dozen lives. And when everybody started singing, that added a great effect that wouldn't have worked if you'd tried it in BATMAN #429.

And the graphics! Pages 1 and 2 were excellent, and the angles of the sewers were perfect. A wonderful way for an enemy to die.

Another classic.

Josh Silverman
Dresher, PA

* * * * *

Dear Bat-dudes,

BATMAN #471 was not a Batman classic story, but it shows something else of great importance.

Just a year ago Batman was a man obsessed with fighting crime alone, and these stories were good but missed a warmer side of the Batman. Since BATMAN #458 he has been slowly building a family, starting with Harold, Ace, and now finally Tim Drake as the third Robin.

Now BATMAN shows a lighter side of the Batman, the side of a family man. He now works as part of a team. The scars of Jason Todd are slowly disappearing, and before we know it BATMAN will be renamed BAT-TEAM.

Carmelo Melluso
Staten Island, NY

Who told you?

* * * * *

Dear Bat-Signals,

Alan Grant's tale in BATMAN #471 was terrific. At the story's end, when the homeless people sang "Hush Little Baby" (is that the title?) to the presumed dead Killer Croc, I was actually... *moved!* Wow! Boy, was that touching. Gee, I'm, I'm...*sensitive!* Thanks, Alan, for reminding me of the warmth I have in my heart (sniff, sniff). Damn! Croc better be dead! If that chump's alive, I would have revealed my sensitivity for nothing! I could be saving that stuff for chicks. Anyway, Norm's art was great (as usual) and complemented Alan's touching tale. Great job, everyone!

I'd like to mention that I'm looking forward to the ROBIN II miniseries, but I'd like to know if DC ever plans to give Robin his own *regular series?* It's not a bad idea. The series would obviously focus on the "Boy Wonder" and would satisfy diehard Robin fans who want to read more about him and his adventures. There is a lot of potential for a Robin series. Robin already has major enemies in Lynx and Anarky. (I like that Anarky kid!) If a Robin series is introduced BATMAN could then focus solely on the Dark Knight. This would please fans who prefer to see Batman as a loner. Finally, DETECTIVE COMICS could feature the "Dark Avengers" together. Thus, everyone is happy. Problem solved, huh?

Anyway, thanks for listening. See ya in thirty, and for me: I Do Declare DC! (Nice, huh?)

Raul Garza Jr.
Mission, TX

You betcha.

* * * * *

And that's it for another month. Thanks to everyone who wrote, including Homer S. Sabile, who sent just about the most beautiful postcard I've ever seen. Remember to keep an eye out for the third issue of GOTHAM NIGHTS, by John Ostrander, Mary Mitchell and Bruce Patterson, with covers by Eduardo Barreto. It's one of the most amazing and original miniseries we've ever done. Also be on the lookout for DETECTIVE COMICS #644, by the new regular creative team of Chuck Dixon, Tom Lyle and Scott Hanna. And of course, next issue...

NEXT ISSUE DEPARTMENT: Someone's going around Gotham torturing men. But who? But why? But where? But when? The victims won't talk. Is there a new vigilante in town? Only the Batman can find out. Be here in just 14 days for BATMAN #479, "Pagan," courtesy of Mr. Alan Grant and guest artist Mr. Tom Mandrake.

—Scott Peterson
left of the dial

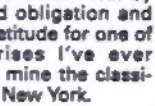
From the Den

There's a note about a foot in front of my nose, on the CPU of the computer. It's from Mac and it's one of the reminders she, kind and patient soul that she is, often leaves in places where I can't miss them, but usually do anyway. It says:

D—
Thank Superman-Tim fan for button.

It's been there a while. It refers to a button someone in Chicago gave Bob Wayne to give to me last summer after I'd done a few hundred words on the Superman-Tim Club—an official club membership button, this is, which I pinned to my white denim jacket and wore everywhere until cold weather started. (I'll probably wear it everywhere next summer, too.) What Mac's note refers to is the fact that we don't know the generous giver's name, and so have not been able to thank her or him. Mac thought From the Den might be a good place to remedy that. I agree.

So, let me begin the New Year by discharging an old obligation and proclaiming my gratitude for one of the nicest surprises I've ever received. It makes mine the classiest denim jacket in New York.



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